

Local donations boost Valley Cares expansion

By MIKE FAHER / Reformer Staff Brattleboro Reformer

Posted:

Reformer.com

Thursday June 6, 2013

TOWNSHEND -- A \$2.8 million expansion at West River Valley Senior Housing has gotten a big boost from the local community.

The project, which is under way and scheduled for completion at the end of October, relied not only on governmental contributions but also on local fund raising.

And that effort paid off, with local sources and the Holt Fund -- which primarily benefits nonprofits that provide health services in the Grafton and Townshend areas -- contributing a combined \$450,000.

"We've got about \$15,000 left to raise -- that's all we have left," said Bob Crego, project manager. "So we've been very fortunate to be able to raise so much from the community."

The expansion project, which has been in the works for a few years, consists of a two-story, 10,000-square-foot addition that includes 12 new assisted-living apartments at the Grafton Road facility.

That will expand West River Valley Senior Housing's assisted-living capacity from 30 to 42. But it will only begin to address a waiting list that has reached about 80.

"We know that the need is out there," Crego said.

Assisted living gives residents access to 24-hour staffing as well as help with medications, meals, housekeeping, laundry and transportation. The new apartments are expected to offer more options for residents who need varying levels of care.

"It gives us better flexibility in how people would like to be accommodated," said Susanne Shapiro, executive director of Valley Cares Inc., the nonprofit that operates West River Valley Senior Housing.

"It also gives (residents) the opportunity to age in place and access services as soon as they need them instead of being in a situation of getting into a crisis at home and then not having a choice of where they go. They're already here," Shapiro said.

"They can live an independent life," she added. "They can eat their own meals, cook their own meals or cook two meals a day and have one meal in the dining room -- all dependent on what they would like. We think that flexibility will target a wider audience."

The project also includes expansion and/or reconfiguration of offices, laundry services and the facility's kitchen, which has become a busy place.

"With the new people moving in and the option to buy into our meal plan, along with also serving the community with Meals on Wheels, we'll produce over 42,000 meals a year out of this little kitchen," Shapiro said.

Valley Cares staff members have been holding regular meetings with residents to update them on the project, which began a little later than administrators initially had hoped.

"We broke ground in February, and that was a few months after we had expected to break ground," Shapiro said. "But I think it's going to turn out in our favor that the completion will happen in the fall which, historically for a facility like ours, is when people want to move in. There's not a lot of activity usually in spring and summer."

Funding for the expansion came from a variety of sources including \$625,000 in federal community development block grant money; \$500,000 from Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and the HOME Program; and \$1.2 million through the Vermont Housing Finance Agency.

But local fund raising also played a big role. One example of that was an art auction held in December at the assisted-living complex.

It was the first time Valley Cares had hosted such an event, but administrators expect to do it again.

"It was not only successful in terms of the money we raised," Shapiro said. "It was a wonderful event for our population, for our staff -- board members and family members helped out. We were all in it together, making it such a huge success."

Mike Faher can be reached at mfaher@reformer.com or 802-254-2311, ext. 275.